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# Thames Science Center

OCTOBER  
1971







# NATURALIST NOTEBOOK

OCTOBER 1971

VOLUME VII

NO. 8

## FRONT COVER

"A JAUNT ON THE NEW TRAIL"

*Photo by Stephan Syz*

*Design by Martha Capizzano*

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# OCTOBER

# THE MONTH OF CRANBERRIES

October is the month when mornings are crisp with frost, winter migrating birds arrive at home feeders, deciduous leaves turn bright colors and drop off trees, annual flowers wither and turn brown, insects disappear, and chipmunks gather food to prepare for winter's hibernation. But October also comes to life in New England's peat bogs when the cranberries ripen to a bright red in color.

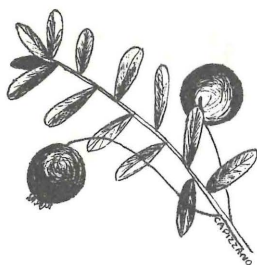
Cranberries grow in cool bog areas that are usually under water in the spring. Through the summer, the water level decreases considerably so that by fall there is but a squishy dampness in the soil.

The species of cranberry most commonly found in southeastern Connecticut is Vaccinium macrocarpon, or the Large American Cranberry. A relative of the blueberry, it is found in mountain regions as far south as the Carolinas and west to the Great Lakes region. It is as common in parts of Michigan as it is locally.

The small, inconspicuous plants grow close to the ground on thin, trailing branches up to four feet long. The tiny, elliptical leaves are about one-half inch long, dark green and somewhat leathery. Cranberries bloom in June. The four pale pink petals of the flower curve backward while the stamens form a point in the center.







Cranberry fruit develops during the summer, and after the first hard frost, the one-half inch berries turn bright red. At that time, the firm, juicy, acid berries are ready to be picked and be used for food on the dinner table. (The birds know when they're ready to eat too!) Most people are familiar only with the tart cranberry sauce used to enhance a turkey dinner, but there are many absolutely delicious concoctions that may be prepared. . . from bread, beverages, and chiffon pie to mock "cherry" pie as well. **STALKING THE WILD ASPARAGUS**, by Euell Gibbons is an excellent reference on the preparation of wild foods. It is in the Thames Science Center Library and can be bought in both hardbound or paperback editions from nearly all book stores.

Fresh cranberries can be kept for a couple months or more in a cool spot. A few of them may soften, however, and they should be discarded. Even on the vine, as one hikes in the brisk out-of-doors through the winter, some firm, edible, juicy cranberries can be found. Their tartness becomes quite delectable and quenches one's thirst.

Because of their tartness, dieters, especially, might find cranberries objectionable because of the sugar required to sweeten them to taste. But did you know that salt will counteract the acidity of the berries so that less sugar is needed? One teaspoon of salt will take the place of half the sugar (1 cup) ordinarily used with a quart of cranberries.

Why not meander through an open, flat bog area this October and fill a pail with some of Nature's nourishment? Wild cranberries are superior in quality than cultivated, supermarket varieties that have been sprayed with insecticides and weed killers. Besides, foraging for your own food is deeply satisfying.

M. M. C.



# THE OCTOBER CALENDAR

OCTOBER IS THE MONTH OF SEEDS, NUTS AND FOOD-GATHERING RODENTS IN FIELDS AND WOODLANDS.

Oct. 1... One of the latest migrating warblers, the black, yellow and white Myrtle feeds in treetops.

Oct. 2... Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets arrive from the North.

Oct. 3... Sharp-shinned Hawks and Kestrels migrate in great numbers along the coast.

Oct. 4... The full Harvest moon.

Oct. 10... White-throated Sparrows arrive for the winter at feeders.

Oct. 12... Fall foliage colors are at their peak.

Oct. 16... Buffleheads arrive in ponds and rivers.

Oct. 17... The Fox Sparrow, largest of the family and rusty red with heavily streaked breast, arrives at feeders during migration.

Oct. 18... The Horned Grebe, small, deep diving ducks fish in coastal waters.

Oct. 20... Watch for winter pine seed eaters: Evening Grosbeaks, Pine Siskins, Redpolls and Crossbills. They were rare visitors last year. What about this year?

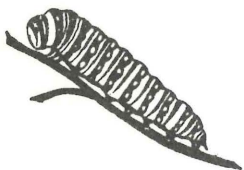
Oct. 21... Flocks of Pintails and Green-winged Teal feed in rivers and coves as they pass through Conn. during fall migration.

Oct. 22... Ruddy Ducks are migrating.

Oct. 25... Hermit Thrushes are common in woods.

Oct. 30... Snow Buntings may be found along coastal beaches.

Oct. 30... Daylight Savings Time ends... set clocks back one hour.





# TSC's NEW NATURE TRAIL

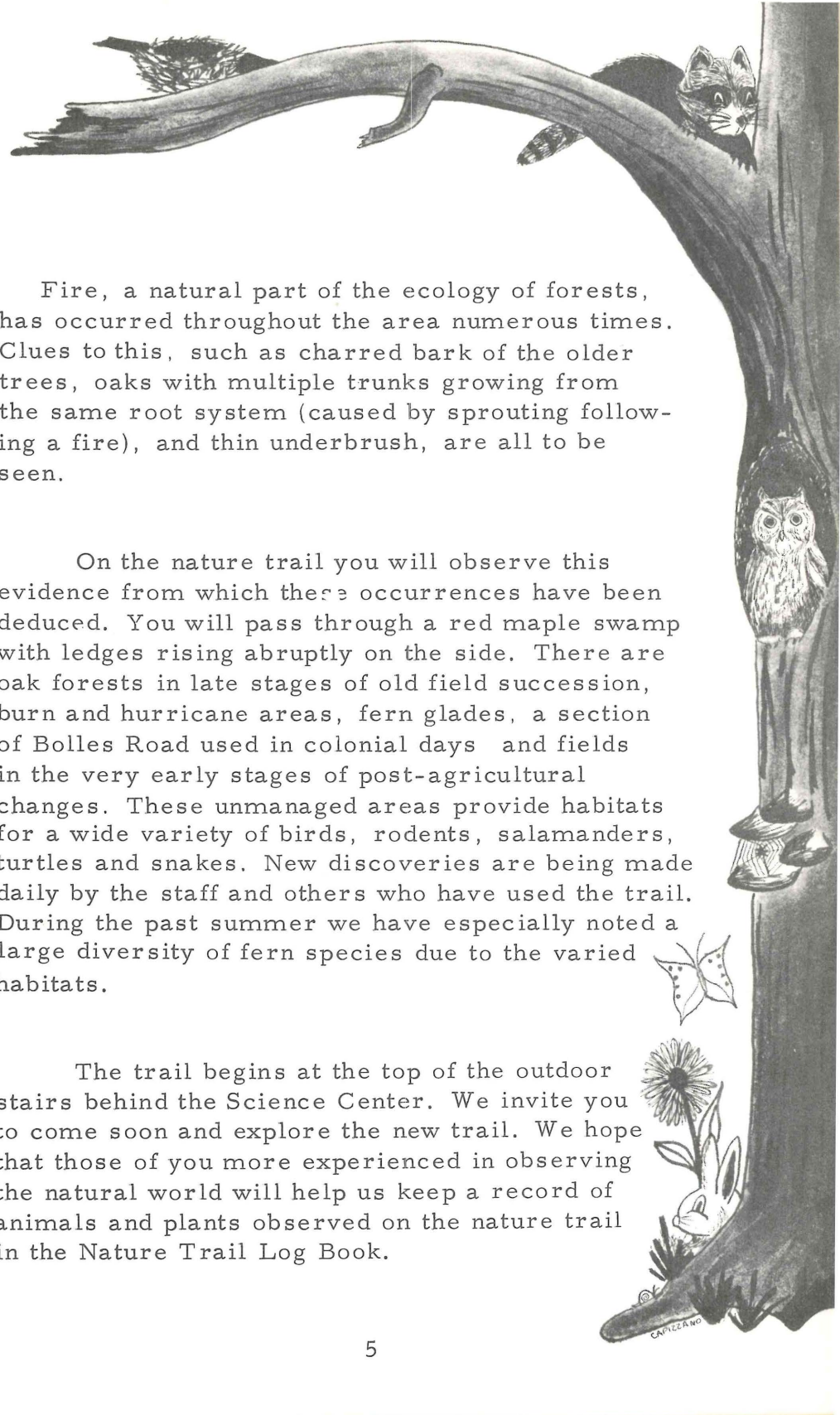
*By Stephan Syz*

The Thames Science Center staff and the Junior Curators have been going full steam since spring to develop a nature trail through the Bolleswood Tract portion of the natural area in the Connecticut Arboretum. The two-mile trail has two loops for those interested in shorter walks. The long trail has more extensive paths passing through a variety of habitats. (See map, front cover) An informative guide, is being developed to help visitors interpret revealing features so as to reconstruct the area's natural and human history. The guide booklet will also point out common and more unusual herbaceous plants, trees and animals.

Around 1740 massive burnings and cuttings were carried out to clear the land for agriculture which reached a peak near 1830. Large oak trees (now found in the woods) with lower spreading limbs tell the story of a life that began where there was a lot of growing room in an open field. During construction of the nature trail, two rims of wagon wheels were found entwined in the roots of red maples in a presently forested area. This, along with stone walls running through the woods composed of rocks that were once removed from fields, and an abundance of relatively younger trees, are signs which attest to much of the land having been open field in the past.

In the years around 1850 farmers began to abandon the land and move West for gold and new land. Lumbering continued in the area and reached a peak at about 1909, when salvage of the blight-threatened American Chestnut was most intense.





Fire, a natural part of the ecology of forests, has occurred throughout the area numerous times. Clues to this, such as charred bark of the older trees, oaks with multiple trunks growing from the same root system (caused by sprouting following a fire), and thin underbrush, are all to be seen.

On the nature trail you will observe this evidence from which these occurrences have been deduced. You will pass through a red maple swamp with ledges rising abruptly on the side. There are oak forests in late stages of old field succession, burn and hurricane areas, fern glades, a section of Bolles Road used in colonial days and fields in the very early stages of post-agricultural changes. These unmanaged areas provide habitats for a wide variety of birds, rodents, salamanders, turtles and snakes. New discoveries are being made daily by the staff and others who have used the trail. During the past summer we have especially noted a large diversity of fern species due to the varied habitats.

The trail begins at the top of the outdoor stairs behind the Science Center. We invite you to come soon and explore the new trail. We hope that those of you more experienced in observing the natural world will help us keep a record of animals and plants observed on the nature trail in the Nature Trail Log Book.





## NOTES FROM HERE AND THERE

BIRD SEED: We have a large supply of seed available. Prices are as follows:

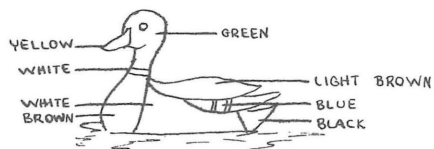
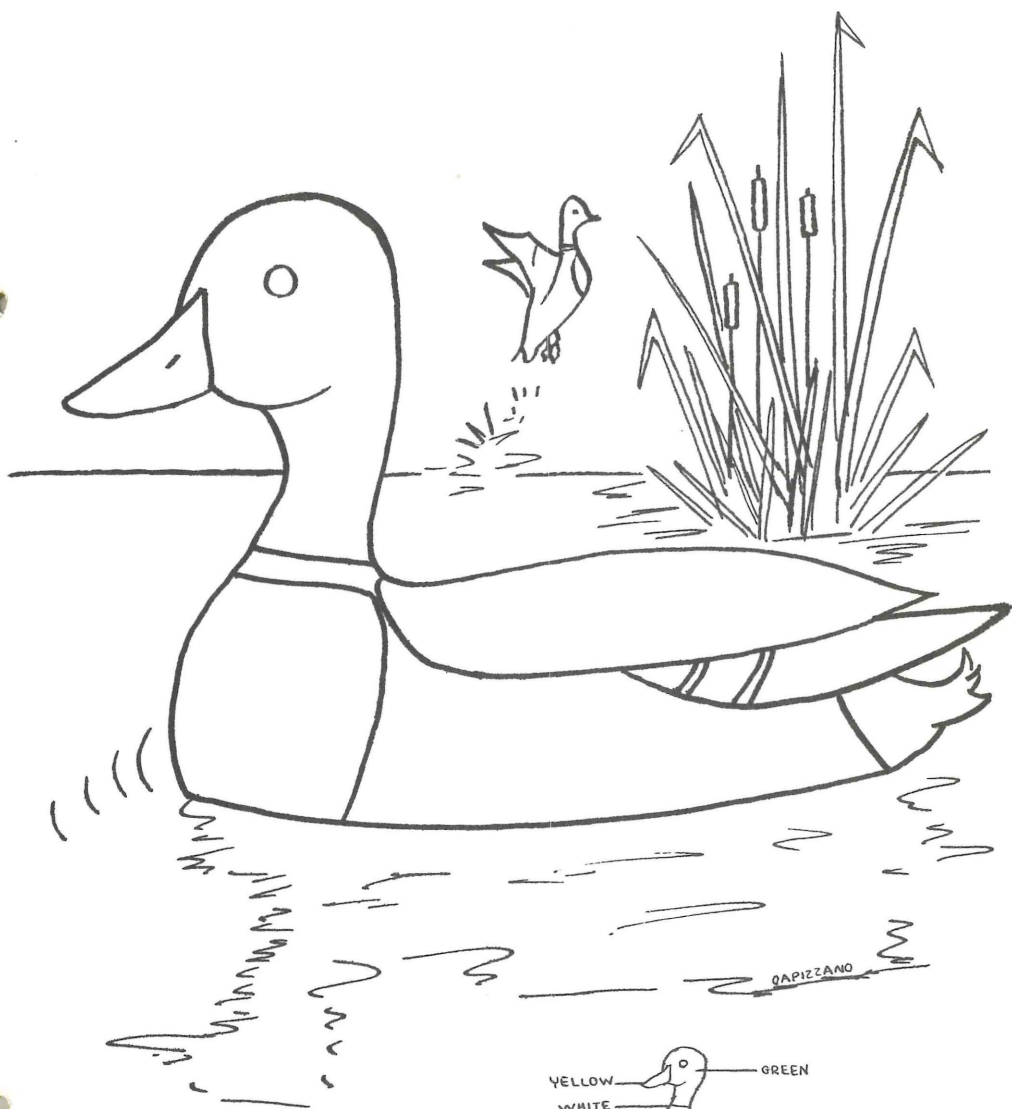
		<u>Member</u>	<u>Non-Member</u>
Sunflower --	3 lbs.	\$ .75	\$1.00
	50 lbs.	\$7.25	\$8.00
Wild bird --	5 lbs.	\$1.00	\$1.25
	25 lbs.	\$2.75	\$3.25
	50 lbs.	\$4.50	\$5.25
	100 lbs.	\$8.25	\$9.50
Thistle --	2 lbs.	\$1.00	\$1.25
	5 lbs.	\$2.25	\$2.75

THE JUNIOR CURATORS, under the direction of curator Martha Capizzano, deserve our special thanks for work in the museum, on the nature trail and for their own newsletter. They have contributed greatly to the Center.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE SENATE AND SENATOR RIBICOFF for the approval of \$1,000,000. for the Long Island Sound study now being conducted by the New England River Basins Commission. The Sierra Club has issued a call to help keep the Sound from becoming a "dead sea." If interested contact: Sierra Club, Long Island Sound Task Force, 250 West 57th Street, New York, N.Y. 10019.



# A PICTURE TO COLOR



THE MALE MALLARD LIVES IN MARSHES  
WITH OTHER DUCKS. IT TIPS UPSIDE-  
DOWN TO FIND FOOD IN THE WATER,



# “... errr. That Was Strider”

*Text and Illustrations  
By Barbara Kashanski*

*There was an old lady from McRyder  
Who sat by a stream near a spider  
She opened her eyes  
And to her surprise  
She was next to not spider but strider!*

Cathy Kashanski



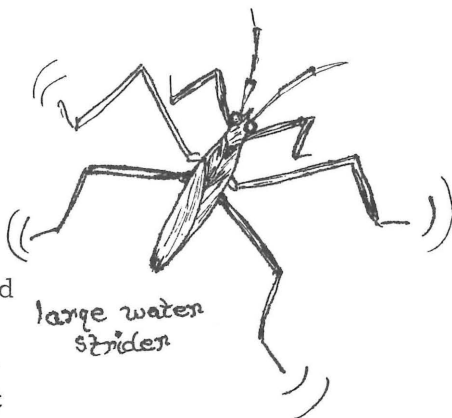
Many people, like the old lady from McRyder, think the water strider is a type of old spider but if they opened their eyes like she did they would notice the strider has 6 legs which immediately makes it a member of the insect family. Spiders have eight legs and belong to a group called arachnids I'll admit that water striders do look a lot like the spider as they scuttle over the surface of the water in streams, ponds and lakes. Often times you will first notice a four dot shadow caused by the dent their feet make in the film that covers the water's surface. Striders travel about on their middle and hind pairs of legs and use the front pair for catching their food. They eat leaf hoppers and other insects that fall



into the water from overhanging trees and shrubs or other aquatic insects. The females lay their eggs on plants or roots at the surface and in two weeks the young hatch as miniature versions of their parents.

There are two kinds of water striders--the large water strider and the broad shouldered strider. The broad shouldered strider is often mistaken for a baby large water strider, but by looking carefully you can tell them apart by the shape of the body. The broad shouldered strider is about one eighth of an inch long and is short and roundish, with a shape similar to a top. The large water strider is long and thin and is about one half inch in length. The two striders also differ in their behavior. The broad shouldered strider spends more time on land as well as more time beneath the surface of the water. They actually run along submerged up side down on the water surface! The broad shouldered water strider inhabits rapidly moving water while the large water striders prefer slow moving streams and quiet pools. Often they will congregate in schools, scattering quickly if disturbed and just as quickly reassembling soon after.

So if you are sitting by a stream or pond, remember it's striders not spiders.





# GOOD GARDENING

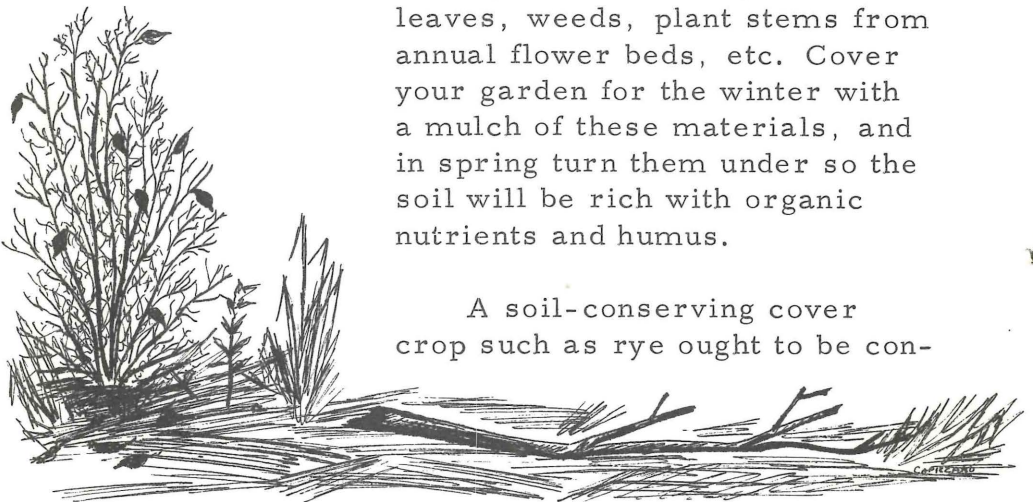
*Text and Illustrations  
By Martha M. Capizzano*

Having completed another growing season, most gardeners forget about their soil, tools and seeds until January or February when the seed catalogues arrive. A good gardener, however, devotes a lot of time in his garden in autumn. Much can and should be done. Just take a look at what Mother Nature is doing in her vast, mighty gardens. She is putting them to bed for the winter as a protection from ice, snow and wind. Woodland floors are covered with a thick layer of leaves, branches and twigs, for Nature self-prunes her own trees. Field grasses turn down to form a deep blanket of protection, and branches from trees are strewn over the area to further insure the earth safety from the rigors of wintertime.



The gardener should look at Nature's example and follow her scrupulously. Fall is the best time to gather an abundance of organic matter: grass cuttings, residue crop matter, leaves, weeds, plant stems from annual flower beds, etc. Cover your garden for the winter with a mulch of these materials, and in spring turn them under so the soil will be rich with organic nutrients and humus.

A soil-conserving cover crop such as rye ought to be con-





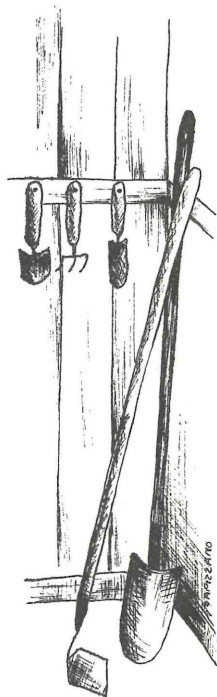
sidered if your garden lacks humus. Plant any sturdy, fast-growing crop and cut it or turn it under before winter and before it goes to seed. This might also be done before fall crops are completely harvested; just plant the cover crop between the rows of corn or other vegetables. When the regular crop is cut, also cut the cover crop, and use both of them as a winter mulch described above.

Early October is the time to plant bulbs that will flower early in the spring. Tulips, daffodils, crocuses, hyacinths and others lesser known should be buried in a bed of compost and garden dirt 3 to 4 times deeper than the diameter of the bulb. Newly planted bulbs and those planted in previous years should be winter-mulched AFTER the first hard frost has cooled the ground to prevent alternate thaws and freezes from heaving the soil. The purpose of a winter mulch over bulbs (and over perennial shrubs and roses) is to hold the cold temperatures in the soil.

Young trees should be protected from possible damage by rabbits and field mice by loosely wrapping hardware cloth or chicken wire around the base.

A few odds and ends also require attention. Remove tomato stakes and flower trellises from the soil and store them in a dry place. Tools need to be cleaned with oil before storing. Power tools also require such cleaning, top and bottom. And don't forget to drain the dirty oil and gasoline. Disconnect the spark plug wire. Tighten, or replace if necessary, all nuts, bolts, and screws, and sharpen all cutting edges.

Your time will award dividends of better home-grown foods, better soil and a happier gardener!





# HEADS UP!

*By Robert L. Dyer*

October is as good a time as any to continue our ramble through the heavens. Even though it is autumn, there is still time to learn the constellations of summer; but you should start early this month. Begin by facing west about 9:00 p. m. Spread out across the western sky are three well-known constellations each containing a blue, white, first magnitude star. These three stars form the so-called summer triangle, which is a right triangle with its base running north and south, and its hypotenuse running parallel with the Milky Way.

The brightest of the three stars is called Vega which is the brightest star in the summer sky and second only to Sirius in the northern hemisphere. Vega belongs with the constellation of Lyra, the Lyre, however, Lyra has little resemblance to the ancient musical instrument of the Greeks. To the south near Vega are four stars in a neat geometrical parallelogram which comprise Lyra.

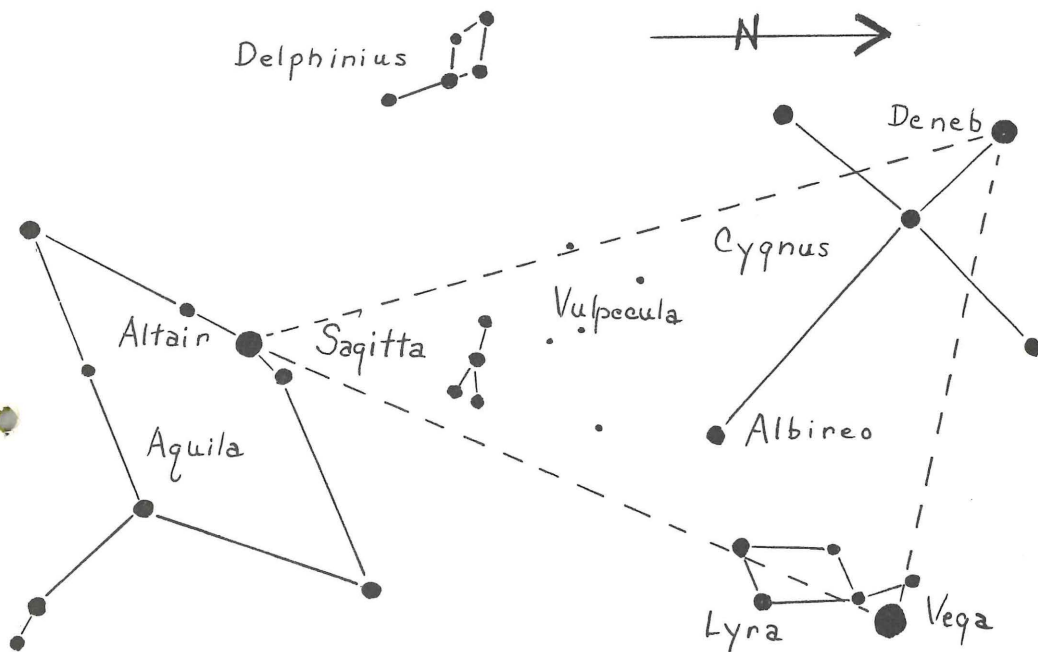
About 25 degrees directly east of Vega is Deneb or alpha Cygnus in the constellation of Cygnus, the Swan, which is also known as the Northern Cross. Deneb is the head and four other stars make up the arms and foot of the cross. Albireo, Beta Cygnus, is the star located at the foot. Through a small telescope Albireo appears as two stars differing both in brightness and color, one gold and one blue.

From Lyra go about 40 degrees south to Altair, the last remaining first magnitude star of the summer triangle. Altair's constellation is known as Aquila, the Eagle. Its shape appears more like a flying goose to me and can be best understood by reference to the diagram.



Once you have located the summer triangle, it is fairly easy to locate some of the less conspicuous constellations nearby. Between Aquila and Lyra are several faint constellations often overlooked. Just south of Albireo lies Vulpecula, the Fox, consisting of many faint stars. Next comes one of the few constellations that look like what one would expect from its name. Sagitta the arrow lies just south of the Fox and north of Altair. Sagitta has four faint stars making up its arrow-like outline. Lastly this month see if you can discover the tiny little kite with a tail just beyond Sagitta's tip and to the south. This group is known as Delphinus, the Dolphin, and is also made of stars fourth magnitude or fainter.

Nearly all of these constellations are in the Milky Way which is visible only on clear dark nights as a faint milky-white band across the sky. This band is actually our own galaxy viewed on edge. There are many pleasing views in these regions, especially to the owners of binoculars which resolve the Milky Way into thousands of stars.





# FROM THE DIRECTOR —

*by Robert S. Treat*

After a summer enjoying the shore and sea and the mountains and woods, we approach fall with the importance of the natural environment in our lives reaffirmed. With reflections on our own experiences combined with thoughts of these conservationists, let us address ourselves in the months ahead to the task of saving threatened natural areas:

Henry David Thoreau--"I wish to forget a considerable part of every day, all mean, narrow, trivial men. . . , and therefore I come out to these solitudes, where the problem of existence is simplified. . .

We need the tonic of wildness. . . We can never have enough of nature. "

Joseph Wood Krutch--"One cannot even begin to 'love Nature' in any profitable sense until one has achieved an empathy, a sense of oneness and of participation. "

William O. Douglas--"Men think that nature was created just for them, just for their exploitation. That is the key to explaining our destructive tendencies. Nature was created for men--but not for men alone. It was created for all living things. Only when men realize that will they have the humility to restrain themselves and treat as sacred that which God created.

One who knows the wilderness at its full glory appreciates how dreadful and oppressive it would be if we ended up with nothing but people on this earth. "

John Muir--"When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe. "



# FIELD NOTES

Stonington and Groton: Barn Island continues to produce good birding. Migrating shorebirds arrived by July 12 when 12 GREATER and 3 LESSER YELLOW-LEGS, 2 SEMIPALMATED PLOVERS and one "peep" sandpiper were found. At least 2 pair of GRASS-HOPPER SPARROWS were nesting here on the 12th. A brood of red phase RUFFED GROUSE flushed from the roadside behind the east pond while from the west pond flew a LEAST BITTERN. On July 18 GOLDENROD bloomed along Rt. 184 in Stonington. The year's first reported SOLITARY SANDPIPER was at Barn Island on August 4. Four STILT SANDPIPERS and 2 PECTORAL SANDPIPERS were noted on August 1 as well as a single VESPER SPARROW at Barn Island. A female WILSON'S PHALAROPE fed on the mudflat on the north end of the west pond on August 9. On August 15 a RED-SHOULDERED HAWK sailed overhead and the New London Birding Club's outing on the 22nd of August disclosed a SOLITARY SANDPIPER, many SEMIPALMATED and LEAST SANDPIPERS, a juvenal MARSH HAWK, 3 OSPREYS, plus the usual assortment of HERONS and GLOSSY IBIS. Three unexpected RED-BREASTED NUTHATCHES were in a mixed species flock that included a BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER on August 22 at Bluff Point in Groton. A WHITE-THROATED SPARROW singing in July and earlier at Assekunk Swamp is indicative of probable breeding, and WILSON'S PETRELS were sighted off Mystic in a heavy fog the second week of August.

Inland Areas: A HERMIT THRUSH on August 2 at Pachaug State Forest and singing WHITE-THROATED SPARROWS on August 12 are excellent finds. Several BLUEBIRDS have been seen in areas near Devil's Hopyard State Park. Another HERMIT THRUSH on August 2 and on August 20, LEAST and ACADIAN FLYCATCHERS and a late NORTHERN WATER-THRUSH were in the Hopyard. BROWN CREEPERS have been reported singing near Hebron since late May to July 31 and are probably nesting.



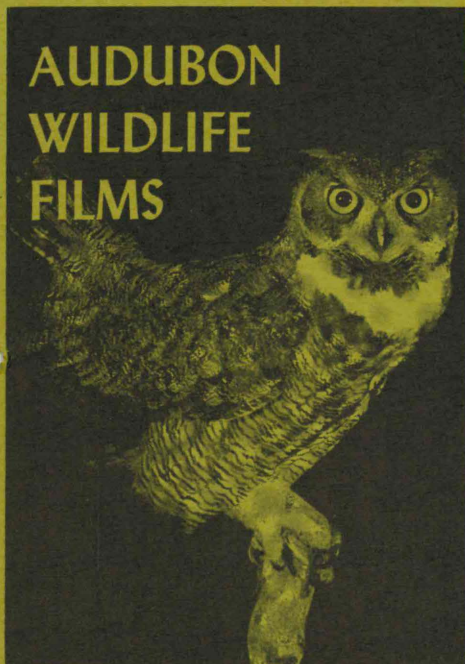
New London and Waterford: This summer's first CICADAS began calling in the Arboretum on July 22. About five WOOD LILIES blossomed during early July at TSC. The only YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT of the summer was sighted in the Arboretum along the Bolleswood Road, on August 7. Landbird migration has started with the arrival of a PRAIRIE WARBLER in the Arboretum on August 23. A RED-THROATED LOON on August 1 and a RED-BREASTED MERGANSER on August 2 at Magonk Point are rather early. Millstone Pond had a female WOOD DUCK and 4 young on the 1st. The elusive AMERICAN BITTERN soared over the marsh at Harkness Park on both August 16 and 19. TRAILL'S FLYCATCHERS were still present at Harkness on August 24. Another late NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH was reported from Waterford as well as a WORM-EATING WARBLER on August 18.

Rhode Island Shoreline: A ROYAL TERN sighted at Quonochontaug on August 2 was the only report of this species. BLACK-BELLIED PLOVERS were seen at the same location on August 6 and the 18th was a good day at the marshes at Gallilee where a PIPING PLOVER and a SORA were seen. Approximately 20 BRANT are summing at Sandy Point in Stonington Harbor and were still present on August 20 as was a VIRGINIA RAIL which flushed from the grass. A trip to Napatree Point on August 15 revealed 3 COMMON LOONS, 5 RED-BREASTED MERGANSER, a female SURF SCOTER and a male WHITE-WINGED SCOTER. All rather unusual at this time of the year. Also sighted were a STILT SANDPIPER, 2 WILLETS and 5 LAUGHING GULLS.

Lyme: TURK'S CAP LILIES were in bloom by July 24 and CARDINAL FLOWERS were discovered on August 2. RATTLESNAKE PLANTAIN finally opened its buds on August 4.

Contributors to his column were: Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Bates, Grace Bissell, Martha Capizzano, Bob Dyer, Helen Gilman, and Homer Kelsey.





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# NATURALIST NOTEBOOK

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MARTHA M. CAPIZZANO  
Editor

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